

Henri Rousseau

1844 - 1910

French, Post-Impressionist Painter

*"It is often said that my heart is too open for my own good."
- Henri Rousseau*

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The Art Heritage Program's Rousseau unit meets the following Colorado Department of Education-Visual Arts Standards (2010)

- 1. Observe and Learn to Comprehend**
- 2. Envision and Critique to Transfer**
- 3. Invent and Discover to Create**
- 4. Reflect and Connect to Transfer**



LEARNING TARGET:

- **I know two important facts about Rousseau.**
- **I can create colorful art inspired by Rousseau's style.**

SUMMARY

- Henri Rousseau (**ROO-SO**) was a French artist whose paintings served as a bridge between the Impressionist and the art nouveau movements. In addition to the Rousseau (1844-1910) featured in this Art Heritage unit, there are other well-known artists with similar names: Orientalist painter Henri Emilien Rousseau (1875-1933) and composer Jean-Jacque Rousseau (1712-1778.)
- Rousseau painted scenes of Paris and its suburbs, bouquets of flowers, portraits of his friends, and forests populated by wild and fantastic beasts. He created a lush imaginary world that was inspired by what he saw in advertisements and at the botanical garden in Paris. His contemporaries regarded his work as innovative, with his figures rendered as somewhat flattened representations occupying an unrealistically shallow space.
- While Rousseau's work was not easily classified into any definitive artistic style of the time, including Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Fauvism or Cubism, it has been considered a forerunner of Surrealism because of its dream-like sensibility. This look was further enhanced by Rousseau's lack of perspective and exaggerated scale.
- Although had many critics, he also had many admirers who demonstrated their admiration for his art by buying, copying or exhibiting his work. These admirers included Delaunay, Picasso, Kandinsky, Miró, Frieda Kahlo and Diego Rivera.

As a child in Laval, France, Rousseau lived in an amazing home. The home was part of a gated tower, built hundreds of years earlier to protect the town. His great imagination (later reflected in his paintings) was likely fueled by the unusual setting of his early life. Although he didn't do well in school, he excelled in art and music. He wanted to be an artist, but his parents could not afford to send him to art school.

In his late teens, Rousseau worked as a clerk in a law firm and was convicted of embezzlement. He volunteered for the army, hoping to receive a lenient sentence from the court for his crime. He served a short prison sentence, spent several years in the army, and later worked as a toll collector in Paris. He was married and widowed twice and although he had several children, only one survived to adulthood.

At the age of 49 he retired and began painting full time. He attracted the attention of the Parisian avant-garde at the 1886 Salon des Independents. Although art critics and the public ridiculed his work, many leading writers and artists sought out Rousseau's paintings.

An unusual man, Rousseau had supreme self-confidence. He was known to barge uninvited into exhibitions and dinner parties, assuming the position of honored guest. His self-portrait entitled "Myself" (1890) shows him wearing a badge of honor as an artist, although the actual badge had been given to the other Rousseau, not him!

No matter what the art critics said, Rousseau knew his work was good. Once he gave his grandchild a painting he made and said "Hold on to this. One day it will be worth a hundred thousand francs." He was almost right, because his paintings are worth far more than that. Today his paintings are shown in the greatest museums of the world.

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POWERPOINT PRESENTATION

Observe and Learn to Comprehend & Envision and Critique to Transfer (VA 1 & 2)

Henri Rousseau (ahn REE roo SOH) was born in northwest France in the city of Laval. The home where the family lived was part of a tower which was fortification for a town. His "house" was hundreds of years old. He liked to draw and was determined to become an artist, but his parents didn't realize they had such a talented son.

We will explore art elements and principles in this Art Heritage unit. Rousseau created exotic landscapes with the use of vibrant color. He used many shades of cool green which he contrasted with spots of warm red or yellow.

Repetition occurs when an element (color, shape, line, value, space or texture) appears more than once in an artwork. When the repeating elements are identical or very similar, a rhythm is established and the viewer's eye moves from one to another. Rousseau's paintings provide visual links that move the eye through the work.

1. **Myself, Portrait-Landscape.** 1890. Oil on canvas. 146 x 113 cm. Narodni Gallery, Prague, Czechia.

In this painting, Rousseau tells us about his past and his plans for the future. Notice he placed himself holding a palette and a paintbrush, declaring his intent to be known as an artist. What do you notice about the images in this painting? *(he painted himself much larger in scale than the other people, buildings and ship.)*



Fun fact: Rousseau updated this portrait over the years. Originally, he wrote the name of his wife, Clémence on the artist's palette. After she died, he remarried and added the name of his second wife, Joséphine.



2. **The Toll House.** 1890. Oil on canvas, 40.6 x 32.8 cm., Courtauld Gallery, London, UK. His first job was working for a law office. Later he worked as a toll collector for the city of Paris, collecting fees for entry to the city. This painting shows the building where he worked. He married and had several children. When he was 49 years old he retired from this job and devoted the rest of his life to painting.

3. **A Carnival Evening** (1886) Oil on canvas, 42.1 x 35.2 in, Philadelphia Museum of Art, PA.

When Rousseau submitted this painting to an art competition, it created a big sensation. Many people criticized it because they felt the trees, clouds and people seemed cartoonish. Others liked how he placed the two figures in front of the winter trees; they liked how the figures seemed to glow, despite the dark forest around them. Where did Rousseau use repetition in this painting?



Fun Fact: Including a perfect circle in his paintings became one of Rousseau's trademarks. Here it appears as a moon, but it can also represent the sun or even a soccer ball in other paintings.



4. **Tiger in a Tropical Storm** (Surprised!) 1891, The National Gallery, London, UK.

The tropical plants in Rousseau's paintings were copied from books, photographs or sketched from his visits to the zoo and botanical gardens in Paris. Notice the expression on the tiger's face, what do you think is happening here? (allow for 2 or 3 brief responses)

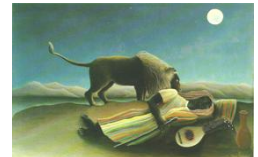
He used 22 different greens in this painting. He used **repeated** areas of color to move our eye in a triangular motion through the painting, from the tiger with his bright red lips and gums to the red leaves to his right and again to the red leaves on the left. He used **contrast** to emphasize the tiger—the warm color of the tiger's coat contrasts with the cool greens of the grasses.

Fun Fact: Rousseau claimed to have served with the French army when they were sent to Mexico by Napoleon III during the years 1861-1867. He said it was there that he acquired first-hand knowledge of the exotic jungles in his paintings. The truth is that Rousseau never set foot outside of France.

5. **Artillerymen** (Les Artilleurs) c. 1893–95, Oil on canvas, 31 1/8 x 39 inches. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

6. **Boy on the Rocks** c.1895-1897, Oil on linen. 55.2x45.7 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; Chester Dale Collection.

7. **The Sleeping Gypsy**. 1897. Oil on canvas, 51" x 6'7"; The Museum of Modern Art, New York.



This is probably Rousseau's most unusual and exotic work. A gypsy sleeps in the desert under a brilliant white moon while a lion gently sniffs at her. He uses **contrast** and **repetition** to make the subjects of this painting stand out. The color of the lion's coat is repeated throughout the landscape, especially in the ground under the lion's feet. The shape of the sleeping woman creates a soft diagonal line on the canvas. Paralleling this line are the repeated stripes of her robe, the walking stick she holds in her hand and in the sand next to her, her musical instrument with its white strings. Which color repeats to move your eye around this painting? What form does Rousseau's perfect circle take in this painting?

8. **Scout Attacked by a Tiger.** 1904. Oil on canvas, 47 3/8" x 63 3/4"; The Barnes Foundation, Merion, Pennsylvania.
9. **Woman Walking in an Exotic Forest.** 1905. Oil on canvas, 39 3/8" x 31 3/4"; The Barnes Foundation, Merion PA
10. **The Football Players** (Les Joyeurs de Football) 1908, oil on canvas, 39 1/2" x 31 5/8". Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.
 In 1908, the first international rugby match was played in Paris between France and England. Rousseau painted this happy scene that same year. The football players almost look like cut-out puppets; their positive shapes seem pasted onto the scene in collage-like style.
Fun Fact: The football player closest to us in the center of the painting is said to be a self-portrait of Rousseau. There is no sun or moon in this painting, but Rousseau included his trademark circle shape. Where is it?
11. **Luxembourg Gardens, Homage to Chopin.** 1908. Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia.
12. **The Waterfall.** 1910, oil on canvas. 116.2 x 150.2 cm. The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL
13. **American Indian Struggling with a Gorilla,** 1910. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, VA. A theme that Rousseau used often in his tropical paintings was man versus beast. What repeats to move our eye around this painting? Which figure draws our attention first, the Indian or the gorilla? Why?
14. **Combat of a Tiger and a Buffalo.** 1909. Oil on canvas, 18 1/2" x 21 5/8"; Heritage, St. Petersburg, Russia.
15. **Flowers (Fleurs)** c. 1895-1900. Oil on canvas, 61 x 50.2 cm. Tate Gallery, London, UK.
16. **Photo of Rousseau.** 1910. Henri Rousseau died in 1910 at the age of 66. The most important thing to Rousseau was not only to be a great artist, but to be known as a great artist as well. Near the end of his life, his dream finally came true.

REFLECT AND CONNECT TO TRANSFER (VA Standard #4)

During the last 5 minutes with your students, perhaps as they are cleaning up or while they are creating, take a moment to encourage the students to discuss and review their understanding of Rousseau:

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

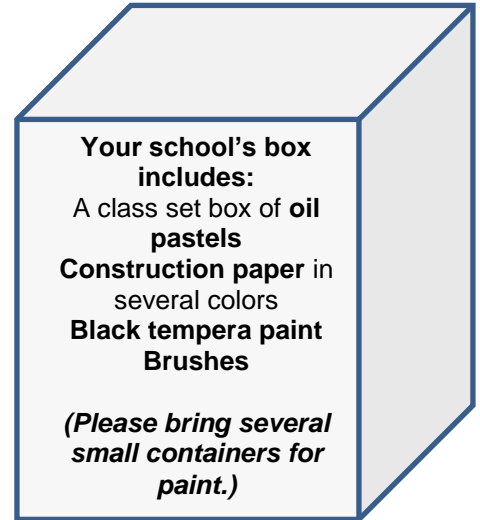
1. *What was one thing you learned about Rousseau?*
2. *What did he do to make his paintings look dream-like or fanciful?*
3. *How will you use leaves and rich color to create your own painting?*
4. *What do you wonder?*

FEATURED ART PROJECT

Invent and Discover to Create (VA Standard #3)

Jungle pictures:

1. Preparation: The paint may be thinned with up to 5 parts water to one part paint. Pour a tablespoon of paint into a plastic container (*leftover containers, cottage cheese containers, etc. work*). If the container has a good lid, so much the better. Mix 2-3 (or more if needed) tablespoons of water in, and stir until smooth. Thinned paint will keep a week or so, but might spoil or start smelling bad, so **DON'T MIX A LOT!**
2. **DO NOT put water into the bottle of paint nor put the thinned paint back into the bottle. (That is why you are only giving the students a small amount to start with—YOU are the person in charge of the paint bottle, not the students!)**
3. Show your students various ways to draw leafy and grassy plants and trees. See handout on types of leaves.
4. Have students draw a jungle scene with leaves, plants, ferns, trees, grass, etc., using oil pastels on the construction paper. They will need to make sure they **lay down plenty of the oil pastels, to make a solid, colorful scene**. Students may draw jungle animals, or any animal they might like. (Rousseau didn't pay much attention to whether an animal was in its proper environment, so your students may be fantastical if they like—lions, monkeys, zebras, etc...)
5. Have students paint over the entire drawing with black tempera paint. The oil pastel will resist the paint, but the scene will have a dark and mysterious look. Use a paper towel to wipe away any excess paint—quickly before it dries!



ALTERNATIVE ART PROJECTS:

- **Art and Technology:** Create an imaginary landscape with **NGAkids JUNGLE**. Mix and match the animals, control the weather and lighting conditions, or construct flowers, trees, and plants. <http://www.nga.gov/kids/zone/jungle.htm> (Use "print" button at top of screen to print, be patient--it takes a little while to upload for printing.)
- **Stained Glass Rousseau Jungles** (Kristin Wisnewski) 3RD -5TH grades.
Materials:
 - silk flowers and leaves or pictures of flowers and leaves
 - pencils
 - Black construction paper 12x18
 - **gel** glue (white glue will not work!)

- oil pastels
- 1. While observing silk plants or pictures of plants, students will sketch a rough draft of flower and leaf ideas (about 10 plants or more).
- 2. Placing the black paper in the landscape position, students will draw a pencil horizon line 1/4-1/3 of the way from the top of the paper.
- 3. Draw a sun or moon above the horizon line. (It may be in the sky or in the setting position.)
- 4. Draw plants in the foreground, mid-ground and background. Make sure flowers overlap. Some in the background should overlap the horizon line and may even slightly overlap the sun or moon. Plants should be no smaller than a golf ball - larger is better - and should not include much detail.
- 5. The teacher will then need to outline all pencil lines with the gel glue. Try to keep the lines as neat as possible by squeezing the glue constantly (avoiding air bubbles) and keeping the tip slightly above the paper. If some lines are so close that the glue will spread too much, do not outline. The students can always add the little details later. Let glue dry for at least 24 hrs.
- 6. When the glue is completely dry, the students will color their jungles with oil pastels. Encourage them to blend color and to try combinations of color on every leaf and petal. Do not leave any areas uncolored. Color evenly so that no black shows through. You want to have a nice thick layer so that it doesn't look like "crayon coloring".
- 7. Polish the hardened glue with a tissue so that there isn't any oil pastel on it. The result is a beautiful stained-glass effect. A favorite of every student!



We learned about Henri Rousseau in Art Heritage.

Rousseau was a French artist who lived from 1844 to 1910. He created richly colored paintings of places he had never been, things he had never seen.



How to Spot a Rousseau:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Name _____ Date _____

